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TAGS: [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: THE NICARAGUAN NATIONAL POLICE AND ELECTORAL FRAUD

REF: A. MANAGUA 1195
[1](#)B. MANAGUA 1343
[1](#)C. MANAGUA 1384
[1](#)D. MANAGUA 1393

Classified By: Ambassador Robert Callahan, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S/NF) Summary: In the period before, during, and after the November 9 municipal elections in Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan National Police (NNP) conspicuously failed to carry out its duties to uphold the Electoral Law and generally failed to carry out its duties to maintain public order in a non-partisan, professional manner. Embassy and other third-party observers noted worrisome lapses in provision of security for the opposition Vamos con Eduardo - Constitutional Liberal Party (VcE-PLC) candidates as well as selective inaction in the face of blatant election fraud and violent actions on the part of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and its supporters. Post is planning to meet with NNP Chief Aminta Granera to present USG concerns on the overall posture of the NNP during the entire election period and the difficulty of continuing assistance programs to the NNP considering their recent actions. End Summary.

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Before the Election: Harbingers of Trouble
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[1](#)2. (C) As early as September 2008, the NNP was beginning to exhibit troubling patterns of partisan bias in favor of the FSLN. On September 20, NNP officials stood idly by as FSLN sympathizers violently disrupted a civil society march in Leon organized by pro-democracy civil society groups. The civil society protest organizers had previously filed for, and received, permission from the Leon government to stage their march, whereas the FSLN groups who violently disrupted the march were clearly acting without a formal permit and outside the boundaries of the law. FSLN supporters taking to the streets of Leon boldly declared that the "streets are for the people - only FSLN people." In the face of these illegal actions, the NNP failed to warn or otherwise deter the FSLN marchers and did not arrest or detain any agitators, even when police themselves were directly threatened by FSLN sympathizers with machetes, mortars and baseball bats. Representatives from the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH) believe that President Ortega ordered the NNP to allow the FSLN supporters to conduct their attacks against the civil society groups without impediment.

¶3. (C) A close contact and former NNP division chief, who was also primarily responsible for re-organizing the anti-riot police unit in the early '90s, told us that the anti-riot police in Leon were clearly acting "under instructions." He explained that standard procedures for anti-riot units in Nicaragua was to form a "triangle-wedge" formation to enter a disturbance, after which the wedge must identify, surround, and detain major "instigators" of violence. In the case of disturbance in Leon, however, our contact pointed out that video footage of the riot police clearly showed a "triangle" unit moving towards, then deliberately avoiding FSLN mayoral candidate Manuel Calderon, who had brought a baseball bat to the scene and was one of the main instigators of the mob. See Ref A for the full account of pre-election clashes in Leon.

¶4. (C) The NNP also clearly demonstrated preferential treatment for FSLN forces in the pre-election period in its tolerance of the illegal occupation of major Managua intersections and traffic circles by FSLN supporters (Ref B). PLC Deputy and National Assembly Justice Committee Chairperson Jose Pallais explained to PolOff that not only did the FSLN activists, who were clearly organized and funded by the Ortega administration, fail to secure any permits from the NNP for their activity, but that their very presence in the period leading up to the election was a clear violation of the Nicaraguan Electoral Law. Nicaragua's Electoral Law (Law 331) expressly prohibits any political gatherings in the 72-hour period preceding any elections. As reported in Ref B, even Managua's Sandinista mayor, Jose Dionisio "Nicho" Marenco (who has clashed with Ortega on various occasions) declared the occupation of the intersections and circles an illegal act. Despite the clear legal prerogative to act, however, the NNP remained silent and inactive. To date, the FSLN has continued to maintain its illegal presence at major intersections in the city as a clear deterrent to political opposition and a none-too subtle threat of violence against those who would stand in their way - all under the watchful and passive eyes of the NNP.

During The Election: NNP Complicit in Electoral Fraud?

¶5. (C) Nicaraguan municipal elections were held on November 9, 2008. Throughout the day, Embassy and third party organizations noted multiple instances of intimidation and improper, if not outright illegal, behavior towards VcE-PLC affiliated personnel (Ref C). In multiple voting centers around the country, NNP uniformed police stood by and watched as FSLN supporters forcibly and illegally ejected VcE-PLC fiscales (poll-watchers) from the sites. According to PLC Deputy Jose Pallais, there was at least one instance of uniformed police officers actively involved in the expulsion of opposition poll-watchers from a voting center - in the FSLN dominated municipality of Telica. Post is attempting to gather more information on the events in Telica, particularly the alleged personal involvement of the Telica Chief of Police in what transpired there.

¶6. (C) In addition, there were widespread reports of "electoral police" involved in electoral irregularities throughout the country. Embassy monitors, media outlets, and other third party organizations reported that the electoral police (who are not affiliated with the NNP) assisted in the ejection of VcE-PLC officials from voting centers, the early closure of key voting centers, and were likely involved in actual physical tampering with a large volume of ballots. (Another close contact and former NNP chief explained to PolOff that although these groups are called "police" in actuality they have no ties to the NNP.) The Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) traditionally has the role of gathering civilian volunteers and provide training to these individuals as electoral police. This year, however, this role was relegated to the Ministry of Government, which in turn charged regional Citizen Power Councils (CPCs) with the task. We know that the electoral police were FSLN members hand-picked by the Ministry of Government. (Note: In a

formal briefing on electoral security, the Nicaraguan Army stated that the electoral police were indeed directly trained by the NNP.) Of course, contact concluded, these purely partisan Sandinista organizations lost no time in gathering groups of FSLN radicals who entered into service with one aim - to steal the elections.

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After The Election: All Dressed Up With Nowhere To Go
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17. (C) The trend of police inaction in face of clearly illegal acts of violence and intimidation continued in the days following the election (Ref D). On November 11, an FSLN mob attacked the VcE headquarters building in Managua, causing extensive property damage and injuring some VcE staff. On the same day, the NNP failed to prevent FSLN forces from burning down the VcE campaign headquarters in Nagarote. Despite receiving intelligence regarding the potential for such attacks, the NNP failed to prevent the attack or apprehend those responsible. It took police over 15 minutes to arrive on the scene in Managua. On November 16, FSLN supporters created an illegal barricade against VcE-PLC supporters attempting to travel to Leon to protest the fraudulent results of the mayoral race there. In a situation reminiscent of the clashes in Leon in September, the NNP again failed to protect the rights of the protesters, who once again had obtained legitimate permits from the NNP itself, to gather safely in Leon. The opposition group was forced to turn away from Leon in defeat.

18. (C) During the week of November 17, FSLN forces gathered in large, armed groups (machetes, home-made mortars, and some guns) to continue their illegal occupation of major intersections and roundabouts in Managua. In many instances, units of anti-riot police - dressed in full anti-riot gear - could be observed loitering safe distances away from the armed FSLN mobs blocking traffic, laying down nail-strips and other traps for vehicles, and shooting their home-made mortars into the air. As a result of this intimidation, opposition leaders were forced to abort a large march they had scheduled on November 18 to protest the electoral fraud. Participants in the opposition told us that police radios were used to position FSLN supporters over the three-hour standoff. Police also physically prevented opposition supporters from accessing the march location. However, opposition leaders were able to take advantage of the FSLN focus on Managua to hold a successful protest march in Leon. In an apparent act of retaliation, on the same night Sandinista sympathizers led by an FSLN National Assembly deputy, broke in and destroyed the radio transmitters of three radio stations widely seen as sympathetic to the opposition. When asked by Nicaraguan newspaper La Prensa why they stood aside and let the crime occur, one of the two NNP officers who had been on the scene frankly replied, "we had orders not to act."

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Granera Embattled, Surrounded - But Still Struggling
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19. (S/NF) The consensus that is emerging after all of these events is that NNP Chief Aminta Granera has almost completely ceded control over the institution to Ortega loyalists ostensibly serving under her. A Former NNP Chief blamed the inaction and seeming indifference of anti-riot units in Managua on Managua Chief of Police Roger Ramirez, who he claimed is receiving orders directly from FSLN security organs. Our contact also accused newly promoted NNP Sub-Director Francisco Diaz, who shares an illegitimate grandson with Ortega, of being heavily involved in electoral machinations involving the NNP. The Nicaraguan private sector is also evidently aware of Granera's loss of control in the NNP. Owner of Nicaragua Brewing Company Javier Solis informed EmbOffs that NNP units on the street are actually directly controlled by Ortega and First Lady Rosario Murillo. (Note: He also informed us that he has offered Granera a job at the Brewing Company.)

¶10. (S/NF) Despite her lack of influence, Granera appears to be attempting to help VcE-PLC figures in a limited fashion. According to various sources inside both the NNP and the VcE-PLC organization, on November 10 Granera personally warned VcE leader and Managua mayoral candidate Eduardo Montealegre of a squad organized by FSLN security chief Lenin Cerna to attack him as he approached CSE headquarters to protest the fraudulent election results. Granera also seems to be looking out for opposition figures who have personal or geographic connections to her. PLC Deputy Jose Pallais, who like Granera is a Leon native, said that when his team discovered ballots marked in favor of VcE-PLC candidates discarded in Leon's municipal dump, Granera acted quickly on his tip to protect the ballots - thus preserving important evidence of electoral tampering by the FSLN. Finally, perhaps in response to widespread criticism over the lethargic response of the NNP to election-related disturbances to this point, the NNP now appears to be taking more assertive actions to protect opposition politicians from Sandinista mobs. Post will continue to closely monitor the NNP posture as the likelihood of violent conflict between FSLN and opposition supporters rises before the CSE's official December 5 announcement of the results of the election.

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Comment
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¶11. (S/NF) Comment: Granera has publicly characterized the actions of the NNP as "balanced and cautious," with a focus on "preventing a bloodbath" as opposed to being concerned about "social conflicts." We remain, however, gravely concerned both by the actions (and inaction) of the NNP during these municipal elections and the systematic attack by the Ortega Administration against the professionalism and independence of the police organization. We are actively seeking a formal meeting with Aminta Granera to present USG concerns about the conduct of the NNP and warn of the effect this might have on assistance programs for the police, but we anticipate that the presence of Ortega loyalists and NNP Sub Directors Carlos Palacios and Francisco Diaz will have a chilling effect on the dialogue in the meeting. In short, at this late stage of the game it is difficult to expect that Aminta Granera will have the power, influence or even, perhaps, the will to change the course of events both within and without the NNP. The validity of our concerns was brought into sharp focus on November 18, when an Embassy officer waved down an NNP patrol for assistance with a FSLN mob that was actively threatening him. The hapless officer was succinctly told: "We are not here to help you."
CALLAHAN